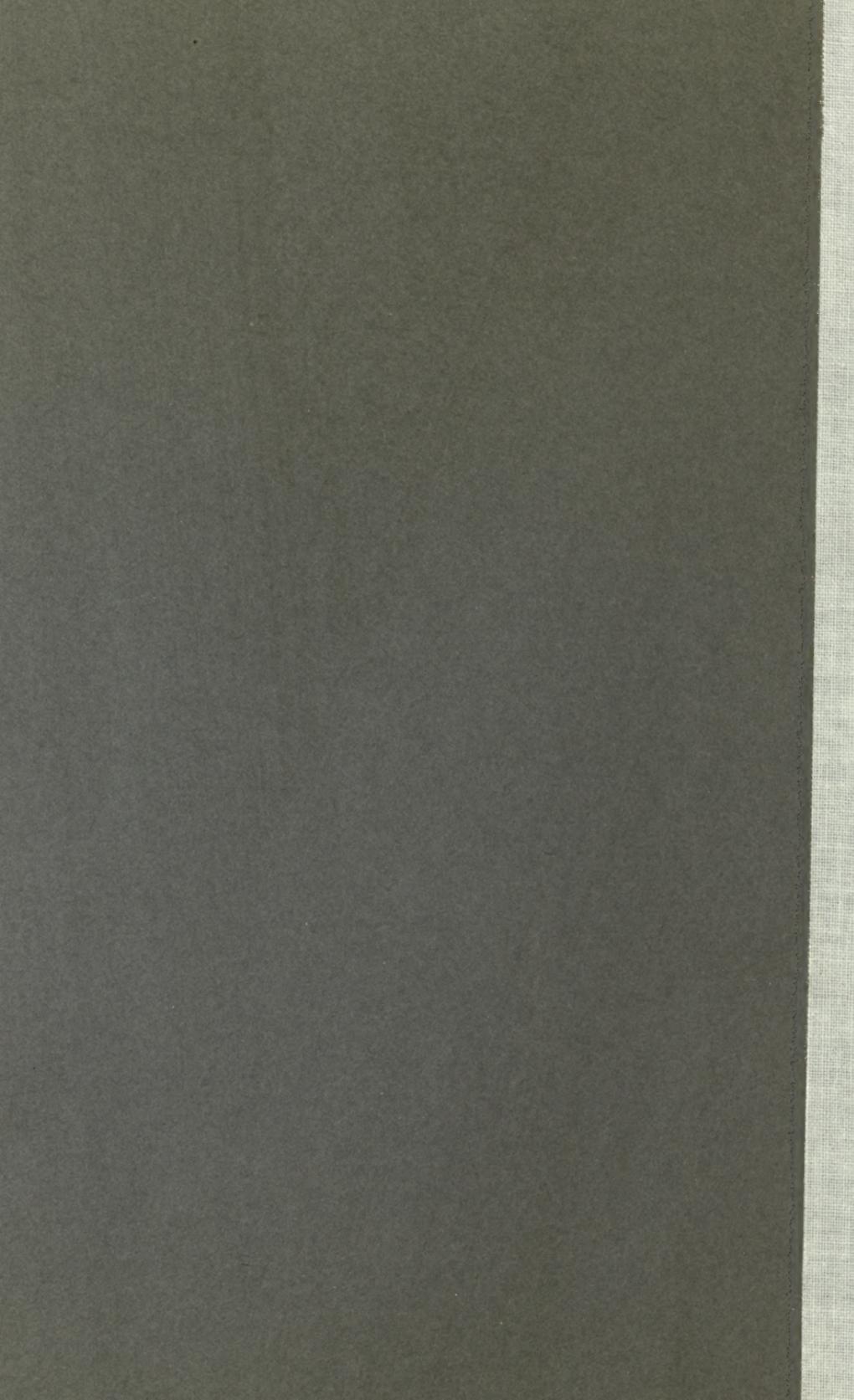




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John Milton

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JOHN MILTON.

**POLITICAL THINKER
and STATESMAN. . .**

WILLIAM WILLIS.



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JOHN MILTON:

POLITICAL THINKER & STATESMAN.

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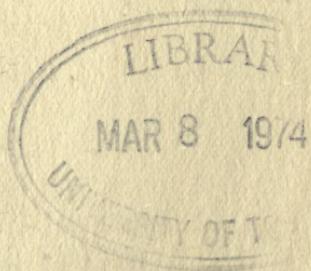
*Delivered to an Assembly of Free Churchmen,
at Cambridge, December 9th, 1908,*

BY

WILLIAM WILLIS, K.C., LL.D.

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JOHN MILTON:

POLITICAL THINKER AND STATESMAN.

THE time and thoughts of each passing generation of mankind are, for the most part, taken up about present things. Few, of any generation, have become acquainted with the past, and some of these have been indebted, for their information and opinions, to the studies and enquiries of others. Few have made any independent researches of their own.

Of the Commonwealth, and the writings of Milton, few to-day have any knowledge. Fewer still have any knowledge of the Prose writings of Milton. Those who, in the past, have become acquainted with them, have not desired to promote their study, because a familiarity with them would tend to destroy many shameful institutons, which those, who have read the Prose writings of Milton, were deeply desirous to maintain. The utmost efforts have been made to prevent their study, and for many years after the Restoration, the volumes, that contained them, were committed to the flames. With the exception of Mr. Masson, and one or two more of Milton's biographers, scarcely any biographer or critic makes any commendatory reference to the Prose writings of Milton, and whilst the utmost praise is bestowed upon Milton as a poet, and he is, in respect of his poetry, bowed into immortality, his Prose writings have been greatly and unjustly disparaged. Among these transgressors, Sir Egerton

Brydges stands conspicuous. He praises the *poet* to excess, but speaks of Milton's Prose writings, as degrading labours, and says that they necessarily embittered his feelings and lowered his mind. "They could," he says, "have been executed by inferior talents. The years spent in their creation would have given us much poetry of grand invention."

In my view, Milton's prose writings could have been produced by no other mind, of his own or any other age. They are the most precious writings in the English tongue. I would rather possess his prose writings than possess the "Paradise Lost" itself. Thank God, we have both his Prose writings and the "Paradise Lost," which, written subsequently, shews that his controversial writings had not affected the purity and fineness of his spirit.

As a result of his prose writings, Milton was in his own day, shamefully and foully assailed, and conduct imputed to him, it is impossible to mention. These defamatory statements, however, called for and received personal references of the sweetest and noblest kind. Bishop Hall, in writing against Milton, had said, "Where his morning haunts are, I wiss not." Milton replied, "I will tell him those morning haunts are where they should be, at home: not sleeping nor concocting the surfeits of an irregular feast, but up and stirring, in winter, often ere the sound of any bell awaken men to labour or to devotion; in summer, as oft with the bird that first rouses, or not much tardier, to read good authors or cause them to be read, till the attention be weary or memory have its full fraught." To those who love the man, the prose writings are amongst the dearest products of Milton's life and thought. In them, reason and poetry are both combined, and they contain principles and instruction, which men of all generations must observe, if they are to attain a spiritual and moral superiority.

Mr. Masson says that the conclusion of Milton's "Reformation in England" is a passage of prose poetry, to which he found nothing comparable, in the whole range of English literature. Lord Macaulay says, "It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should in our time be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff, with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the 'Paradise Lost' has the great poet ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, 'a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and symphonies.'"

The last attack on Milton's prose writings has been made by a Professor of History, whilst editing Lord Macaulay's Essays, with notes. The object of the Professor is to explain the many allusions found in the writings of Lord Macaulay; the Professor has taken care to drop into his notes his dislike to Milton and Milton's prose writings. His work did not call for any such expressions. The Professor states in one of the notes, that Milton is rarely or never the tranquil seeker after truth; that he has contributed almost nothing to the lasting treasures of human wisdom, and that his prose compositions are party pamphlets.

As Milton could not be a statesman or political thinker of the highest order, without being a lover of truth and a sublime believer in Christ; it is well to see how far such a statement as the Professor has made, can be sustained.

The tranquil seeker after religious and political truth seldom finds it; the warm-hearted and fervid seeker, such as

Milton, soon holds it in his embrace. As for Milton not being a seeker after truth, he sought it from his earliest years. The description of our Lord's feelings as a youth, which appears in the "Paradise Regained," is doubtless derived from the remembrance of his own :—

" When I was yet a child, no childish play
To me was pleasing ; all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be public good ; myself I thought
Born to that end, born to promote all truth
All righteous things ; therefore above my years,
The law of God I read, and found it sweet ;
Made it my whole delight."

To keep the truth, he had so patiently sought, he surrendered the whole object of his early life ; listen to his words : " By the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child to the service of the Church, and in my own resolutions. Coming, however, to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe *slave* and take an oath withal, which unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure or split his faith, I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking bought and begun with servitude and forswearing."

Milton suffered for truth, and declared, in his old age, that suffering for truth's sake is fortitude to highest victory. He dislikes those who are the dividers of unity, " who neglect and permit not others to unite those dissevered pieces, which are yet wanting to the body of truth. To be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it, this is the golden rule in theology, and makes up the best harmony in a church ; not the forced and outward union of cold, and neutral, and inwardly divided minds." Milton regarded truth as the richest merchandise of the nation.

In all his prose writings, Milton ever sought the public good, and the love of truth and conscience had play. In his argument for unlicensed printing, he says:—"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and argue freely, according to *conscience* above all liberties." In his second Defence of the People of England, he writes "But since my enemies boast that my blindness is only a retribution for the transgressions of my pen, I again invoke the Almighty to witness, that I never, at any time, wrote anything which I did not think agreeable to truth, to justice, and to piety."

Milton's life was a great moral whole. No stain rests upon his character, and no where was his life spent, in greater purity, than at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he stayed from 1625 to 1632. Speaking of his residence at the University, he says, "Here I passed seven years in the usual course of instruction and study, with the approbation of the good, and without any stain upon my character. After this, I did not, as this miscreant feigns, run away into Italy, but of my own accord returned to my father's house, whither I was accompanied by the regrets of most of the Fellows of the College, who showed me no common marks of friendship and esteem."

His personal purity cannot be assailed. Answering, in his prose writings, another slanderer, he says, "The mention of Geneva brings to my recollection the slandering More, and makes me again call the Deity to witness, that in all those places where vice meets with so little discouragement, and is practised with so little shame, I never once deviated from the paths of integrity and virtue; and perpetually reflected that, though my conduct might escape the notice of man, it would not elude the inspection of God." He tells us that he was early desirous of producing a work that should not be raised "from the heat of youth, nor the vapours of wine, nor obtained from the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren

daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His seraphim, with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases."

Prayer to the Eternal Spirit went hand in hand with all Milton's writings and with all his actions. Milton's prose writings, are the writings of one, who sought to lay down principles on which alone a lasting society can be erected. He was labouring, not for a sect, but for the public good; not for a petty triumph of a few years, but for the establishment of those immutable principles which are identified with the well-being of society to the end of time. The circumstances under which he entered into the controversies of his day, show his passion for truth and liberty, and his great fitness for guiding men in the way of life. He forsook his harp and the quiet and still air of delightful studies; he doffed his garland and singing robes to enter upon the defence of beleagured truth.

Milton had shown himself to be a true poet, ere he wrote any of his prose compositions. He had written "The Ode to the Nativity," "L'Allegro," and "Il Pensoroso," some Sonnets, "Comus" and "Lycidas," many of his Latin compositions, and Italian Sonnets. Enough poetry had been written to place him permanently among the greatest poets of his country. The last two lines of the "Lycidas" seem to have been written in almost a prophetic spirit—

" At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue
To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new."

"To fresh woods and pastures new," certainly, for Milton, with the exception of a few Sonnets, one or two translations from the Psalms, was to write no more poetry for at least twenty years, and with the exception of his Juvenile Poems, published in 1645, to publish none for thirty years. In 1638 Milton started on his continental journey, with letters

of commendation from Sir Henry Wooton, the Provost of Eton College. After seeing, at Paris, Grotius, who was then Ambassador of Christina of Sweden, Milton passed into Italy, and there became acquainted with the most learned Italian scholars of his age. He visited Florence, Sienna, Rome, and Naples, and purchased a large number of books to cherish and sustain his imagination, in coming days. Whilst in Italy, he hears that Charles I. was commencing with the Scotch, the Second Bishops' War, as it is called. Charles I. was endeavouring, by force, to put the English Prayer Book upon the Scottish people. Milton took all his books to Venice, shipped them for England, and then hastened back himself, and "seeing" as he says "the way open for the vindication of English liberties, I thought it was unbecoming of me to be spending my time abroad, whilst my own fellow-subjects are in the field, in difficulty, and contending for public liberty." When Milton returned to England, Parliament had not met for ten years. A Parliament was summoned in April, 1640, and dissolved in May of that year, lasting scarcely a month. The Commons of England resolved they would give Charles no supply, until he had redressed their grievances. Angry at their firmness, Charles I. dissolved this Parliament, and lost the opportunity of putting himself upon a firm footing with his subjects. He was obliged ultimately to summon another and distinguished Parliament, which met on November 3rd, 1640, and is known by the name of the Long Parliament. Not a separatist or dissenter could be found in either house; there were, perhaps, three or four Presbyterians, in the Commons. The members of both houses were men of devout religious life, and nearly all connected with the Church of England. It was these men, and not dissenters, who removed so many clergy from their livings; they were such, as Milton had described in his "Lycidas," and foretold their doom:—

"Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheepphook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!"

This Parliament redressed many grievances, and inflicted punishment upon politicians, priests and judges. Milton did not care to enter into the vindication of their policy, and he resolved to devote himself first to the great question of religion. His first work was the "Reformation of Religion in England." His reasons for writing it are thus set forth:—"I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty; that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of men from the yoke of slavery and superstition; that the principles of religion, which were the first objects of our care, would exert a salutary influence on the manners and constitution of the republic: and as I had from my youth studied the distinctions between religious and civil rights, I perceived that if I ever wished to be of any use, I ought, at least, not to be wanting to my Country, to the Church, and to so many of my fellow Christians in a crisis of so much danger. I therefore determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents, and my industry, to this important object."

Milton was the rediscoverer of the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom. He was the enemy of all political churches, and thought that the conduct of a Church of Christ should be the last business to which political rulers should devote themselves. Writing to Cromwell, when Protector, Milton said, "Leave the church to its own government and relieve yourself and the other public functionaries, from a charge so onerous and so incompatible with your functions; no longer suffer two powers, so different as the civil and the ecclesiastical, to commit fornication together, and by their mutual and delusive aids, in appearance to strengthen, but in reality to weaken and finally to subvert each other; if

you will remove all power of persecution out of the Church, and no longer suffer men to be bribed to preach the gospel by a mercenary salary which is forcibly extorted, rather than gratuitously bestowed; if you will do all this, you will always be dear to those who think not merely that their own sect or faction, but that all citizens of all descriptions, should enjoy equal rights and equal laws." He did not think the Church of Christ came into existence to be fondled by statesmen. "I am not of the opinion," says he, "to think the Church a vine in this respect, because as they take it she cannot subsist without clasping about the elm of worldly strength and felicity, as if the heavenly city could not support itself without the props and buttresses of secular authority." He would in his day have disestablished and disendowed the English Church, a work still waiting for Englishmen to accomplish, after the lapse of nearly two hundred and fifty years. The land, in the age of Milton, was full of great religious souls, but there were not many who had risen to the mental and religious grasp, which would lead to the disestablishment of the English Church. Milton tells us this in his sonnet on Sir Harry Vane. Speaking to him, Milton says, "besides to know

Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,
 What severs each, thou hast learnt, which few have done:
 The bounds of either sword to thee we owe:
 Therefore on thy firm hand religion leans
 In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son."

Nearly all the great men of that age thought religion could be attended to by political rulers, and they applied themselves, with the utmost zeal, to the purification of the English Church, and the establishment of a church which should be full of evangelical teaching. It is their glory, that they summoned the Westminster Assembly of Divines, to give their advice in the completion of such a work. 'The

political rulers of to-day pay not the slightest attention to the conduct of the English Clergy, who live in violation of the conditions, on which alone they are entitled to the revenues they enjoy. The work of Milton, in the matter of disestablishment and disendowment, remains to be accomplished. Disestablishment would destroy no man's spiritual life, but leave him free to exert himself truly for the extension of Christ's kingdom ; and disendowment would afford the rich and wealthy the opportunity of giving freely of their substance to the cause of Christ, if they love it. Milton establishes the voluntary principle as sufficient for the maintenance of religious teachers, and providing all the money needful for the work of the Church. " All constrained payments for supporting a ministry are inconsistent with the very genius of religion. What shall be found heretofore given by Kings or Princes out of the public, may justly by the magistrate be recalled and re-appropriated to the civil revenue, what by private or public persons out of their own, the price of blood or lust or to some such purgatorial and superstitious uses, not only may, but ought, to be taken off from Christ, as a foul dis-honour laid upon him." In the matter of disestablishment and disendowment, Milton stands the greatest statesman of his country.

When I speak of him as a statesman, I do not mean that he was a Member of a House of Commons, capable of introducing a Measure, which somebody else has prepared for his approval. I do not call a man a statesman, because he is a master of intrigue, and uses language to conceal rather than disclose his thought. I do not call him a statesman who effects combinations, with all who are rendered discontented by the just measures of a noble ministry, or who excites a body, which should be independent of all external influence, to reject the measures of a House

of which he is a member. I call Milton a statesman, because he lays down the principles upon which alone the noblest society can rest. Milton says, "To govern a nation piously and justly, which is only to say happily, is for a spirit of the greatest size and divinest mettle." His conception of the duties of a statesman may be seen in the words he addressed to the Protector, "At once wisely and discreetly to hold the sceptre over three powerful nations, to persuade people to relinquish inveterate and corrupt, for new and more beautiful maxims, and institutions, to penetrate into the remotest part of the country, to have the mind present and operative in every quarter, to watch against surprise, to provide against danger, to reject the blandishments of pleasure and the pomp of power; these are exertions, compared with which, the labour of war is *mere pastime*: which will require every energy and employ every faculty you possess, which demand a man supported from above, and almost instructed by immediate inspiration."

In his own day, Milton accomplished much for the cause of religion. He assailed the bishops, discussed the ancient episcopacy, and showed that the modern, "the historic" bishop has no relation to the ancient bishop; that the ancient bishop was a pastor of one church, and attended to its wants, stayed in one place and was elected by the believers in Christ, to whom he ministered. He tells the English people that if they want an ancient bishop they must have "a man *elected* by the popular voice, un-diocesed, unrevenued, unlorded, and leave him nothing but brotherly equality, matchless temperance, frequent fasting, incessant prayer and preaching, continual watchings and labours in his ministry." As a result of his teaching and influence, the bishops, who had made themselves obnoxious to almost every political thinker,

were deprived of their seats in the House of Lords, of the property they enjoyed as bishops, and of their rank and station. Lord Falkland, although against the absolute removal of the bishops, described their offensive conduct, and the part they had taken in the cruelties of the reign, in terms stronger than those which Milton himself employed. Under the Commonwealth, for nearly twenty years, no one was chosen to be bishop, as the nominee of the Crown, and people were spared the dreadful sight of seeing men asking the Holy Ghost's guidance in the election of a bishop, with the penalties of a *praemunire* (*i.e.* the loss of liberty and of all property) hanging over their heads, if they did not elect the person whose name was mentioned in the *congé d'elire*. This system, together with the bishops, came back with the restoration of the pious Charles the Second, and exists in all its offensiveness, to-day.

Milton also was in favour of the widest distribution of the sacred scriptures, with the right of private judgment in their interpretation. He did not think that the scriptures needed for their true interpretation a "glossing priest": he thought that every man could truly interpret the scriptures for himself. He did not think that the scriptures needed to be supplemented by the fathers, or interpreted by an imaginary creature called "the church." Archbishop Laud thought that if a man had any difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of the scriptures, the *church* should instruct him. Upon this method Milton exclaims, "We have teachers who think the Divine Scriptures need a supplement. They cannot think any doubt resolved, and any doctrine confirmed, unless they run to that indigested heap and fry of authors which they call 'antiquity.' Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of blind chance hath drawn down from of old to this present, in her huge drag net, whether fish or seaweed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, those are the fathers."

Milton would have the bible taught freely in all the public schools, as affording the truest foundation for Christian teaching. All his life, he was a most devoted student of the scriptures. He was thrilled with delight, as he read of the Bible being brought into free circulation. No one can read "Paradise Lost" without seeing what a vast knowledge of the Bible he had acquired. The teaching of the scriptures had been his constant guide. He believed it to be the best guide for nations and rulers. In his "Paradise Regained," published within three or four years of his death, Milton makes the Saviour say in reply to the suggestion of the Arch-Enemy, that he should study the writings of the Philosophers and famous orators of Greece :

" Their orators thou then extoll'st as those
 The top of eloquence—statists indeed,
 And lovers of their country, as may seem ;
 But herein to our Prophets far beneath,
 As men divinely taught, and better teaching
 The solid rules of civil government,
 In their majestic, unaffected style,
 Than all the oratory of Greece and Rome.
 In them is plainest taught, and easiest learnt,
 What makes a nation happy and keeps it so,
 What ruins Kingdoms, and lays cities flat;
 These only, with our law, best form a King."

After the lapse of two hundred and fifty years, the question of religious instruction in the schools maintained by the public, remains to vex and divide the nation ; while the rich and the wealthy, and the bishops contend for the teaching of doctrines, at the expense of men, who disbelieve them and deny them. Milton was in favour of a complete system of education, which would be suitable to the children of the wealthy, but desired that all the people of whatever rank or station, should become

prophets of the Lord. Milton's view that the bible and the bible alone should be the religion of Protestants, influenced the political leaders of his age. This doctrine, the doctrine also of Chillingworth, was at length presented by Oliver Cromwell to the English people, as the only guide that could be left them in establishing a National Church. Although the Westminster Assembly of Divines published as the result of their labours the creed and the shorter and longer catechisms, and many and varied declarations of faith, Milton thought that the simplicity of the Gospel called for no such creeds or statements. In his "Argument for Unlicensed Printing," he says, "This is the order of God's enlightening his church, to dispense and deal out by degrees His beam, so as our earthly eyes may best sustain it. Neither is God appointed and confined where and out of what place these His chosen shall be first heard to speak ; for he sees not as man sees, chooses not as man chooses, lest we should devote ourselves again to set places and assemblies and outward callings of men ; planting our faith one while in the old convocation house, and another while in the chapel at Westminster ; when all the faith and religion, that shall be there canonised (*i.e.* put into rules) is not sufficient without plain convincement, and the charity of patient instruction, to supple the least bruise of conscience, to edify the meanest Christian, who desires to walk in the spirit and not in the letter of human trust, for all the number of voices that can be there made ; no, though Harry the Seventh himself there, with all his liege tombs about him, should lend them voices from the dead, to swell their number."

The influence of Milton on Cromwell and his associates is seen in the preparation of the Instrument of Government dated December, 1653. In the thirty-fifth clause which relates to establishing a religion for the nation, these words

are found, "That the Christian religion, as contained in the scriptures, be held forth and recommended, as the public profession of these nations—England, Ireland, and Scotland."

As a statesman and political thinker, Milton's fame can be securely placed upon his splendid "Argument for Unlicensed Printing." In it he goes far beyond the precise subject matter to which he was addressing himself, and points out that the value of government is in the restraints it imposes. There are two ways of dealing with the Press, the one by not allowing anything to be printed, unless it has the approval of certain men appointed by the Crown or Legislature, and the other, that in case the printed matter contains any defamatory statement affecting individuals, proceedings may be taken against the publisher either by way of indictment or by action to recover damages. Both these methods were adopted by Charles I. Milton objected to the former method of control, and not the latter. By a decree of the Star Chamber, July 11th, 1637, no book of history or relating to state affairs could be printed without the license and permission of the Secretary of State; no book concerning the laws but by permission of the Chief Justice or the Chief Baron; and all books of divinity, philosophy, and poetry, must be licensed by the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of London. These obnoxious provisions fell into disuse, on the assembling of the Long Parliament. But in 1643 they were re-enforced. Milton would not suffer an infringement of individual liberty from any person; so he addressed his great argument for unlicensed printing, in the form of a speech, to the Lords and Commons of England. It contains the most forcible arguments and powerful vindication of great principles, to be found in our language. As a specimen of his prose writings let me quote one or two passages from the introduction, which should be remembered to-day.

First of all Milton does not deny that books want looking after. "I deny not," says he, "but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves, as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors; for books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragon's teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man, as kill a good book; who kills a man, kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burthen to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

Then comes the important discussion of the value of restraint; restraint not by divine law, but by the acts of political rulers, who after all, are only one's fellowmen. It is put to him or against him that there may be bad books. So there are. How shall they be dealt with? Can they only be dealt with by placing the control of all the products of the brain in the hands of such individuals, as a Lord Chancellor, or an Archbishop, or a Secretary of State? Milton says, that while you are watching all things that come from books, you need also to look after every song, every gesture, every look from man or woman. "It will ask more than the work of twenty licensets to examine all the lutes, the violins, and the guitars in every house; they must not be suffered to prattle as they do, but must be

licensed what they may say. And who shall silence all the airs, and madrigals that whisper softness in chambers? The windows, also and the balconies, must be thought on: there are shrewd books with dangerous frontispieces set to sale; who shall prohibit them? Shall twenty licensers?" Moreover, it must be remembered that as you remove what you call the matter of sin, so you remove the material of virtue. "Look, how much we thus expel of sin so much we expel of virtue; for the matter of both is the same." And then Milton starts a view which accounts for the fall of man in this way, that God resolved that man should be left to his own choice, to grow up to be strong, self-controlling, with a principle of government in him, or to fall. "Many there be that complain of divine providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force. God, therefore, left him free, set before him a provoking object ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his praise, the reward of his abstinence." He is not a virtuous man who is kept from drink only because he is locked up in a house where no drink is, or from the indulgence of lust because he is in a monastery, or a woman because she is in a nunnery. According to Milton, he is the virtuous man who can look on sin with all its pleasures and allurements, see and know them, and yet abstain. That was the fate of Adam, that he should know good and evil, knowing good by evil. "It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leapt forth into the world." Hence Milton says, "Were I the chooser, a dram of well doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hinderance of evil doing. For God sure esteems the growth and compleating

of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious.” “I cannot,” he says, “praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.” Milton points out, that some restraints may actually produce more evil than the restraints are directed to correct. Milton would seem not to like a morality that rests upon an Act of Parliament, which very often is but the expression of men of feeble mind. He found the greatest protection against sin and wrong doing in a profound love for Christ. The death of Christ supplies the greatest motive power for well doing and good conduct. When Milton wrote his argument for unlicensed printing, he did not think that the day would come when companies, formed to purchase newspapers, should publish matter which has no elevating tendency, which should contain invective, and misstatements, in the interests of one political party. The liberty of the press which Milton valued, the only liberty he asked, was “the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to *conscience*, as above all liberties.”

In his great argument, Milton has pointed out that whole nations may fare the worse for the loss of a rejected truth, and that a rejected truth is seldom recovered. We have fallen upon calamitous times, through forgetfulness of Milton’s teaching, that there is a presumption against every restraint imposed by political rulers, which can only be destroyed, by reason and argument. What reason could be offered for restraining anyone from supplying food or drink convenient and suitable to the life of man? The supply of drink, if free to all, would have been without any temptation or allurement; and no further provision would or could be made for its sale, than is made for the sale of bread or grocery or meat. The legislature thought fit to

restrain everybody from the sale of intoxicating drink, except a chosen few ; these, however, were to stand between the public and the brewer. The victualler's license was to be *his*, not the brewer's ; it was not to last longer than a year, subject to its renewal, in the discretion of the magistrates. The brewers at length secured the granting of licenses to their own nominees, and obtained thereby a right to supply, without restriction or oversight, all goods consumed or sold upon the premises. The brewers have at length obtained a permanent license for their houses and risen to untold wealth ; and when the Commons, by their representatives, sought to restore to the nation, on the most generous terms, the discretionary character of the licenses, and to check some abuses of the trade, the brewers have been able, by the pecuniary interests they have built up, to secure the rejection of the Licensing Bill at the hands of an assembly, which should be the purest and most high-minded assembly in the empire, or not exist at all.

Milton has been chiefly disliked, and numbers to-day still dislike him, because of his defence of the action of the Commonwealth in trying Charles I., and sentencing him to death. Permit me to say, that I myself should not strangle or behead anybody, nor put any man to death, no matter what his crime ; yet, if any man deserved to suffer for a long series of crimes that stripped a nation of its liberties, wasted its resources, and drenched the land with blood, it was Charles Stuart. A court as lawful as any that ever tried a prisoner, tried him ; its proceedings were conducted with a forbearance that has never been surpassed, and by judges and prosecuting counsel that will rival any age or period of the English bar or bench. He was charged with only one offence, viz.—that of having levied War against the Parliament. Charles would not plead : he knew that he had no answer to the charge preferred against him. He

pretended that the court had no jurisdiction. President Bradshaw told him that the court had jurisdiction, and said, "Now plead." Charles would not plead, and after some evidence was offered, he was sentenced to death.

His own conduct procured this sentence. The office of the crown only entitles the holder to certain powers and authorities; and he must be, in every respect, obedient to the law. With the exception of the eleven years, from 1629 to 1640, no monarch had ruled in England, if by monarch is meant the government of one man. From the earliest periods of our history, the supreme authority had resided in the King, Lords, and Commons, and many who held the office of the crown had been punished for their misconduct. Milton proclaimed the doctrine, which should be remembered to-day, that every person, exercising public authority, however high in station, is liable for misconduct in the exercise of that authority, and that all public authority is derived from, and conferred by, the people; that the people can resume the authority whenever they think fit. "And surely," says Milton, "they that shall boast, as we do, to be a free nation, and not to have in themselves the power to move or to abolish any governour, supreme or subordinate, with the government itself, upon urgent causes, may please their fancy with a ridiculous and painted freedom, fit to cozen babies: but are indeed under tyranny and servitude; as wanting that power, which is the root and source of all liberty, to dispose and *æconomise* in the land which God hath given them."

After the Dissolution of the third Parliament, March, 1629, the King issued a Declaration, shewing, as a favour, the causes of the late Dissolution. In it he said "Princes are not bound to give account of their actions, but to God alone." He had previously told the House of Commons he was not willing to receive any more remonstrances,

to which, if offered, he must give a harsh answer. He told the House of Commons that he was to have the over-swaying authority in national affairs, and not they. More arrogant and insolent utterances never fell from the lips of any king. The spirit they disclosed, sealed his doom. These words of the King were never forgotten, and Milton, justifying his deposition in his splendid treatise entitled, "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates," writes thus, "To say kings are accountable only to God, is the overturning of all law and government. The power of correcting and controlling all magistrates remains fundamentally in the people, and cannot be taken from them without a violation of their natural birthright." Every act of Charles was full of arrogance and cruelty.

In order to shew the justification for putting Charles to death, a slight sketch of his conduct must be given. Charles I. had, after considerable reluctance, accepted as binding upon him, the provisions of the Petition of Right. One of its clauses renders illegal all taxation except by consent of Parliament. After this measure was enacted, Charles still continued to take tonnage and poundage, without consent of Parliament, and violated other principles of that important measure. In March, 1629, Sir John Eliot resolved to bring the conduct of the king before the House of Commons. Charles, to prevent the discussion, decided to dissolve the Parliament, and told the Speaker, that if the questions, raised by Eliot, should be brought before the House, he was to rise and leave the chair. This would prevent the House proceeding to any business. The instructions which Charles gave to the Speaker, were altogether unlawful, and ought not to be obeyed. The Speaker is the servant of the House of Commons, not of the Crown. During the discussion of these great questions, the Speaker rose with intent to leave the chair

With the sanction of the House, the Speaker was held down in the chair by Finch and Holles. The Commons closed their door. The King sends to demand admittance. It is not granted. Whilst the speaker is held down in the chair, Eliot's resolutions are put to the assembly and carried with acclamation. The door of the Commons is then opened, and its members hasten forth. The King immediately dissolves the Parliament. For their conduct in the Commons, Eliot, Selden, Holles, and others are brought before the King's Bench, and at length, for conduct taking place wholly in Parliament, and in obedience to the House, they are unlawfully sentenced to be imprisoned at the King's pleasure, and Eliot was fined a sum of £4,000.

Sir John Eliot declined to admit that he had done wrong in presenting the resolutions to the House, or in keeping the Speaker in the chair. Eliot, one of the greatest men of his age, and perhaps the greatest amongst the parliamentary leaders, was confined in the Tower from March, 1629, to November, 1632. His confinement in the Tower afflicted him with a terrible disease, that of consumption, and although he petitioned Charles to relax his imprisonment, telling Charles that in the opinion of his medical men, change of air alone could save his life, his petition met with a blank refusal. He died in the Tower. The burial place of all his ancestors was at Port Eliot in Cornwall. After Sir John's death, the son presented a petition to the King, asking that the body of his father might be placed amongst his ancestors. This was refused, and on the back of the petition, can still be read, "Let him be buried in the parish where he died." He lies buried in the Tower, without any stone or memorial to mark his resting place. This cruel act of refusing to relax Eliot's imprisonment, amounting to an intentional taking of human life, was ever remembered.

Charles proceeded against all law to impose ship money upon his subjects, without any justification, except the opinions of unjust judges.

Charles was a party to the cruel sentences of the Star Chamber and the High Commission Court, and the sentences pronounced upon Prynne, Bastwick, and Burton, sank deep into the minds of the English people. Men, of whom the world was not worthy, were seen standing in the pillory, mutilated and streaming with blood. These men, as despotism never desires to see its victims again, were banished to Jersey, Guernsey, and the Scilly Isles.

The war against the Scotch brought Charles into pecuniary need, and he was obliged to call a Parliament, the Long Parliament, in November 3rd, 1640. Many Acts of Parliament, redressing grievances, were passed, which Charles assented to; but no one who studies carefully the proceedings of the time, can believe that he freely accepted the measures of the Lords and Commons. He was ever desirous of destroying their authority and setting himself free from their restraints. He planned the overthrow of the Parliament by bringing up Scotch and Irish troops to London, offering to them as a reward, the spoliation of the City of London. This shocking scheme was only prevented, by a communication of the same, privately made, to the Parliamentary leaders. On the suggestion that Hampden and four other members of the House of Commons were guilty of high treason, Charles decided to seize them, in the House of Commons itself. The House had nothing more than its mace as an instrument of defence, yet, with a band of soldiers at the door of the House, he entered the House itself, went up to the Speaker's chair, and looked around to see if the men he desired to seize were present. He did not conceal how much it troubled him, when his eyes rested not upon any of the five members. He then said "I see all *my birds* are flown." "If some vulture in the mountains,"

says Milton “could have opened his beak intelligibly and spoke, what fitter words could it have uttered at the loss of his prey.”

Over the question of the control of the militia of the kingdom, Charles decided to make war. *He* was indeed the rebel, using force to destroy the most important part of the English constitution. There was nothing he did not possess ; pleasurable life, wealth, station, rank, the prerogative of choosing his own ministers, refusing his assent to measures he disapproved, and the calling and dissolving of Parliaments. He possessed everything man could desire, and yet to get rid of a restraint as to the militia, he resolved to make war upon the Parliament. If war was levied against him, it was high treason. What shall be said of the ruler who levies war against his own subjects ? *He* was the rebel. This war lasted nearly six years, during which, as a great contemporary writer said, “England looks pale from loss of blood.”

Negotiations took place, with a view to the restoration of Charles to the throne, which only disclosed his falsity and dis-honour. *He* was no martyr to the English Church, as his admirers delight to style him. To retain the crown, his majesty proposed to confirm the Presbyterian Government, the Assembly of Divines at Westminster and the *Directory*, for three years; and that a free consultation and debate be had with the Divines at Westminster (twenty of his majesty’s nomination being added unto them), whereby it may be determined by his majesty and the two Houses, how the Church should be governed after the said three years. No man could believe him to be sincere in making these proposals. As no man’s liberty was safe if he were, once again, capable of exercising power, it became necessary to put him to death, and Milton justified the sentence, when propounding the great principles which justify a people in displacing a governor who is unworthy of their trust. These principles of Milton, and the examination

of Charles' conduct, are found in his great works "Eikonoklastes," "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates." and "The defence of the People of England."

The "Eikonoklastes" is an exposure of the falsity of nearly all the statements contained in the "Eikon Basilike," supposed to be written by Charles the First. Charles did not write it. It was a cruel act of Gauden and his friends, to put miserable excuses into the mouth of Charles, which he never would or could have made for himself. The introductory sentences of the "Eikonoklastes" may well be reproduced: nothing more dignified can be found in any language. "To descend on the misfortunes of a person fallen from so high a dignity, who hath also paid his final debt both to nature and his faults, is neither of itself a thing commendable, nor the intention of this discourse. Neither was it fond ambition, nor the vanity to get a name, present or with posterity, by writing against a King. I was never so thirsty after fame, nor so destitute of other hopes and means, better and more certain to attain it."

As almost Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Milton displayed the loftiest spirit. He instigated and shared the splendid foreign policy of Cromwell. No one then dare affront the English people. If any nation was indulging in any conduct injurious to the interests of England, such conduct must cease. Oliver received no foreign pension and never submitted the power of England to the control of any other nation. Oliver protected the weak and the unhappy, and made the oppressor to cease his oppression. The principle of Oliver's Policy is found in Milton's utterance "It is not distance of place that makes enmity, but enmity that makes distance. He therefore that keeps peace with me, near or remote, of whatsoever nation, is to me as for all civil and human offices, an Englishman and a neighbour." Everyone is familiar with the intervention on behalf of the Vaudois.

Milton conducted all the correspondence with the powers of Europe, and offered the Prayer "Avenge O Lord, Thy slaughtered Saints."

Milton was republican both in theory and practice, and acquiesced undoubtedly in the three resolutions declaring (1) That the People of England were, under God, the original of all just power in the state, (2) That the Commons, in Parliament assembled, having been chosen by the People, and representing the People, possessed the supreme power in their name, and (3) That whatever the Commons enacted should have the force of law, without the consent of either King or House of Peers. These resolutions were passed by the Commons, January 4th, 1649. Neither the Commons nor Milton were acquainted with a Constitutional Sovereign.

Milton was partly induced to accept the republican form of Government, because he thought a Republic would be modest in its expenditure. He was accustomed to say that the "mere trappings of a monarchy would be sufficient to support a Commonwealth." If Milton were alive to-day, he would be surprised to hear, that in the life of men now living, the Annual Expenditure of the Government has increased from fifty millions per annum, to a hundred and fifty millions per annum.

Milton argued for the abolition of tithes as being a taxation for religion and an unfair tax upon the land itself. He would have removed every burden from the land until it could be cultivated to advantage, and made the law such, that land could be conveyed, without legal assistance, and at a slight expense. He also urged, when blind, the removal of hirelings out of the Church, and that every effort should be made to procure a capable ministry for the English people. He urged, after the death of the great Protector, that every attempt should be made to prevent the return of Charles II. The Presbyterians, who had taken part in the

war against Charles, and who, if he had been killed in battle, would have been partakers in the act, pretended to be offended by the decision to put Charles I. to death. They also desired to place the religion of England, more or less, under their control, and were the victims of their own delusions. It is a sad thing to reflect that the Presbyterians were deceived in their estimate of Charles II. They regarded him as a religious man standing upon the "rock of Israel," and believed that his restoration would bring blessings to their native land. Milton saw the return of monarchy would plunge the English people into an abyss of shame. His foresight was just.

History has disclosed to us the terrible consequences of the Restoration. Charles II. was indeed a royal hypocrite. He had actually been, at the time of his return, admitted as a member of the Papal Church, and had proved himself most grossly sensuous. The cup of England's degradation was soon full. With the Restoration came back prelacy, a clergy that were unfit to discharge their duties, and a persecution which gave the Free Churches their greatest splendour. The religious and secular education of the English people was neglected; their manners were not chastened, and about one hundred years after the Restoration, Robert Hall described the English people as the most wretched and depraved people upon earth. Political abuses accumulated.

Since the Reform Bill, many great and noble changes have taken place; many good institutions have been established, particularly the Board Schools: but England still needs all which Milton advocated, and which we, as Free Churchmen, would introduce into the public life of this country; above all, the English people have lost the aim and hope of Milton, that they should teach all other nations how to live. Milton did not desire that the rulers of his native land

should by bloodshed and violence extend their feeble authority, over other lands. He tells the people of England and Scotland "Seek only virtue, not to extend your limits, for what needs to win a fading triumphant laurel out of the tears of wretched men?" The *Britannic* Empire, built up to a glorious and enviable height, with all her daughter islands about her, was sufficient for his fame. These constituted the subject of his prayerful meditation and earnest hope. The faith in Christ, which Milton exercised, is that which the English people need to-day. If that faith be extinguished, and the pagan rule of England be continued, her doom is sealed, and she will be reckoned amongst those peoples who having attained to the utmost height of earthly power and grandeur, have perished through their forgetfulness of God.



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